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From: **Deirdre Goldsmith** [REDACTED]
Date: Tue, Apr 24, 2018 at 5:54 AM
Subject: Re: Proposed Charter Change. After two failed budget referendums, the Council decides.
To: Sam Adlerstein [REDACTED] >
Cc: Bryan Hurlburt [REDACTED], Liz Costa <[REDACTED]>, Marilee Beebe <[REDACTED]>, Abigail Jeffries <[REDACTED]>, Jan Rubino <[REDACTED]>, Karen Moran <[REDACTED]>, Katie Murray [REDACTED] >

Good Morning Committee and Other Invested Town Residents,

I am extremely grateful for all the time and attention the committee has devoted to the Charter.

I had followed up after the 4/19 Public Hearing with an email to Marilee Beebe, but I haven't heard back. I had asked approximately how many people were in attendance at the first public hearing, as it is unclear when I read through the minutes of that hearing.

I didn't actually count the amount of people at the hearing last Thursday, but my guess is that there were 15-20 residents in attendance, outside of the committee members, themselves.

A few things transpired at the 4/19 Public Hearing that made me uncomfortable, and I wanted to express my concerns over them.

First, I was alarmed that Ms. Sue Eriksson initially chose only to reference Sam

Adlerstein's letter by stating that he had written about a concern, that the committee had addressed it, and that it was all set. As Ms. Eriksson is highly involved in town politics, and it appears that she was functioning as the chairperson of this committee, why did someone so seasoned in such forums choose to withhold sharing this letter until I requested that she do so about an hour later? As this was a public hearing, it seems wrong to knowingly suppress public participation in such a manner.

When I spoke up to assert that I did not share the feelings of the vocal dozen or so residents who began expressing their opposition to the ideas in Sam's letters, I was directly addressed by a committee member who sat at a table for three, adjacent to the rest of the committee members. His tone and rather lengthy and heated response to me about what was wrong with my perspective seemed inappropriate for a member of the committee of a public hearing. It should be expected that members of the committee maintain a level of composure if they do choose to respond - even if it's a 'hot topic.'

In speaking with many residents in the community since the 4/19 meeting, several parents expressed frustration that the 2nd of 2 public hearings took place when they were away during school vacation week with their families, and were unable to participate. Others have expressed that they didn't even know it was going on.

I am left with a feeling that the 4/19 Public Hearing was comprised of only a handful of assertive residents. I worry that their strong opinions are being considered as "the public response" to the potential charter revisions. Is there any possibility of an additional public hearing being scheduled before your final recommendations are shared with the Town Council? If this cannot be arranged, I request that the Charter Committee please indicate the approximate amount of people in attendance at each of the hearings in the recommendations report to the Town Council.

Again, I am very grateful to the Charter Committee members for undertaking such a task, and I know you've put in a great deal of time and effort. Tolland is fortunate to have you.

On Sun, Apr 22, 2018 at 8:29 AM, Sam Adlerstein [REDACTED] wrote:

Good Morning! I hope your weekend is going well.

Subject: **Proposed Charter Change. After two failed budget referendums, the Council decides.**

Thank you for indulging me on a town issue that you have each already weighed in on. I'm sorry I am late to the party. **Regardless, I'm now appealing to you as residents. Would you reach out to the Town Council?**

A number of you, like me, have spend hundreds of hours and hundreds of dollars of your own money toward passing budget referendums. You followed the process closely, and believed the budget was balanced and right for Tolland. You advocated with a small group of other residents. You were then crushed when the budget failed. You felt like you didn't do enough, didn't make enough phone calls. There were far too many people who didn't know .. perhaps didn't even know there was a vote happening.

As we think about the design of our referendum process, it's an opportunity too, to ponder how a representative democracy works. I'm far from an expert, AND, since all politics are local, town politics are perhaps our country's best opportunity to reason these things out :)

Below are some additional thoughts from this AM, for what they are worth. Deirdre Goldsmith also wrote a very nice letter to folks yesterday. She is copied here if you weren't included. If you believe otherwise, would you let me know? I'd love the opportunity to broaden my perspective :)

Respectfully,

Sam

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From: **Sam Adlerstein** [REDACTED]
Date: Sun, Apr 22, 2018 at 7:51 AM
Subject: Re: Charter Public Hearing - followup question
To:
Cc:

Dear,

I'm sorry I'm just getting to this now, and that I didn't get more involved in the Charter process. Sometimes it just feels like catch-up (or left behind).

A big part of the commission's answer on limiting referendums is that "there is not enough public support." I don't believe that answers the question. I thought that they were appointed to take all the facts and make decisions on behalf of Tolland. Public opinion is a critical part of decision making, and a way to better understand the facts. However, short of widely answered surveys or focus groups, or a vote, the input at any meeting is just that, input. It must be used judiciously, not, of course, to be ignored, but to be taken in course. And, if we truly wish to learn, preferably not done in a way where addressing any one issue is a much a surrogate for other issues, sometimes dozens of issues.

Each committee member was appointed to answer: **In light of the evidence, aside from any specific agenda, what do you believe is best for all of Tolland?** AND, you are expected to answer that in some cases IN SPITE of strong opinions of a few people in the room. You were asked to lead and represent. I offer this not in defense of one particular issue. It is equally true for all decisions.

In reading the minutes, a theme is where to draw the line for "public participation decisions" and elected Town Council decisions. The story within the story continues. As I try to understand the reasoning behind some of the comments, One resident, after strongly disagreeing with a limit on budget referendums says, "Taxpayers pay 75-80% of their taxes for the BOE and related items and he does not believe this is clearly understood by the residents. A referendum that splits the two would allow." Is the heart of matter an agenda to significantly reduce the funding of public education, and how to change our system to allow this to happen? If that is what folks want, it would be more transparent to say that than to argue that resident's voices aren't heard through a system of elected official decision making.

If a majority of residents felt the way Mr. Belsito (I single him out because of his status as an elected representative) and others feel, I would never volunteer my time for public office. *"For many residents, it [a budget referendum] is the only voice they feel they have when it comes to local government."*

About failed referendums, *"Higher voter turnout and multiple referendums logically indicate that the budget set forth by the town council at that time was not in line with the expectations of the townspeople."* Having lived through and participated in the process, that is not the case. I do not believe the speaker nor others could point to anything in the budget that was out of line. Those referendums were fueled by emotion and a feeling of loss. Some people became energized to vote as a protest against taxes. The counter then became getting involved (GOTV) through a generalized

feeling that our schools and town services were slipping. The newspapers fueled the feelings on the front pages. The Town Council asked, "How do we find out what people really want, should we do an exit poll?" Asking that, in my opinion, is expecting that people knew the specifics of the budget, that they had followed closely the detailed decision making. We are all taxpayers and we all want to preserve and sustain the quality of our town. So, in the end, the poll question the Council was considering asking could rightfully be best answered by the Council.

Lastly, I can't help but worry about raising this issue right before a budget referendum, back to my point about these votes becoming surrogate for other issues. It is easy to understand people not wanting their voice nor their rights taken away, and I would never support that happening. This proposal is common sense alternative. It provides an opportunity for a continued, strong public process that ensures decision making that is best for Tolland.

Respectfully,

Sam

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From: **Deirdre Goldsmith** [REDACTED]
Date: Sat, Apr 21, 2018 at 2:38 PM
Subject: Referendum Changes
To: Deirdre Goldsmith [REDACTED]

Hello Fellow Tolland Friends and Neighbors,

Last Thursday I attended the last of the two public hearings on revising the Town Charter. I did not attend the first one, but I've read the minutes.

One of the "hot button" issues that voters had discussed at the previous meeting was whether or not the Town should limit the number of referenda held each year to no more than three. If after these referenda the budget still hasn't passed, then the Town Council would have final authority to approve the budget. Such a change would help prevent numerous failed budgets. Our town leaders are elected to represent the people of Tolland, and have devoted incalculable volunteer hours to understanding the needs of our residents, services and schools in the most efficient way possible. To revise the referendum process so that there is a limit to the referenda would have benefits. This would be a compromise of preserving the referendum process, but allowing for a fair, informed ending if it doesn't pass in the first few tries.

During Thursday's public hearing, we were told that there had been "little to no support" shown for a referendum limit. Unfortunately, though, I don't believe a lot of parents were even aware that this public hearing was taking place. I only attended the one on 4/19, where there were only two other parents of school-aged children in attendance. I believe that under-representation of parents resulted in the almost unanimous opposition to limiting the referendum process. It's the Tolland Public Schools that take the biggest hit each time the Town of Tolland's referendum doesn't pass. Parents weren't heard, and their opinions are currently not being weighed in on this major decision.

However, I was also told that any support for limiting the referendum process should now be made directly to the Town Council, who will be the ones to ultimately accept part or all of the Charter recommendations.

So my ask: If you have children in school in Tolland (even if you don't!), and if you feel it is in the town's best interests to limit the referendum process to no more than three, rather than an endless succession of failed referenda each year, please send a quick email to the town council expressing your preference. This could take less than a minute, and can be very short, such as:

Please support limiting our annual referendum process to two/three, and if it doesn't pass, let the Town Council make the final decision.

Here is the email address for the Town Council: towncouncil@tolland.org

Here is the link to the first public hearing's minutes, in case you wish to get a sense of how things stacked up there : <https://ecode360.com/documents/TO1208/public/398310469.pdf>

If you are not interested in doing this, or are not in agreement, no problem. I don't assume to know how anyone feels about Tolland's famous multi-referendum process. I just wanted to be sure you were in the loop on what's going on as the Charter has been opened, and changes to it are on the table. I believe this only comes up every decade or so.

If you want to discuss this situation at all, please call me 860 690 1429. Thanks so much!

Deirdre Goldsmith